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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 003710

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SUBJECT: OFFICIAL RESULTS FROM ARMM ELECTIONS DELAYED; MORE
ALLEGATIONS OF FRAUD

REF: A. MANILA 3708

[B](#). MANILA - OPS CENTER TELCON 08/10/2005

[C](#). MANILA 3677

[D](#). MANILA 3655

[E](#). MANILA 3611

[F](#). MANILA 3116

Classified By: Political Officer Timothy Cipullo for
Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#). (C) Summary: Final results from the August 8 elections in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) have been delayed due to poor weather and other reasons. Unofficial results indicate that Zaldy Ampatuan, the favored candidate for governor, and running-mate Ansarrudin Adiong, the favored candidate for vice-governor, will win handily. The law and order situation in the ARMM remains largely calm. In the meantime, allegations of fraud are increasing with one gubernatorial candidate claiming he was cheated and supporters of another making similar claims. Mission observers, along with those from other countries, also witnessed apparent irregularities and non-transparent procedures on election day and after. Unfortunately, despite GRP promises to make them clean, the elections already have a taint on them, though it is difficult to assess whether the alleged fraud was large-scale and had an impact on the results. End Summary.

Final Results Not Yet Out

[2](#). (U) Commission on Elections (COMELEC) officials have announced that bad weather has contributed to a delay in the proclamation of the final results from the August 8 ARMM elections. COMELEC Chairman Benjamin Abalos was unable to convene the regional board of canvassers on August 10 because heavy rains in Cotabato City -- where the group was supposed to meet -- forced his helicopter to divert to another location. In addition to the weather, some other technical -related problems have cropped up that have caused COMELEC to have to delay issuance of the final results, which were expected on August 10.

[3](#). (U) Several non-governmental and religious groups, accredited by COMELEC, have released unofficial tabulations that show Zaldy Ampatuan headed for an easy victory in the gubernatorial race. Ampatuan's running mate Ansarrudin Adiong is also leading the vice governor's race by a wide margin. Both Ampatuan and Adiong were endorsed by the Lakas Party, which is part of President Arroyo's governing coalition. Unofficial partial tallies, as of late August 11, show Ampatuan with 482,213 votes, ahead of Mahid Mutilan with 177,769 votes and Ibrahim "Toto" Paglas with 61,257 votes. Adiong leads with 388,988 votes over his vice gubernatorial challengers Hatta Dimaporo (112,266 votes) and Ismael Abubakar (94,439 votes). COMELEC Commissioner Resurreccion "Rex" Borra has announced that he expects to announce the winners of all 24 Regional Assembly seats at some point on August 11. It is not clear when the final results from the governor and vice governor races will be available.

[4](#). (U) The law and order situation remains largely calm. Mission has not heard of serious election-related violence in the ARMM. Security forces remain in place. (Note: See ref a for a report about bombings in Zamboanga City on August 10. Zamboanga City is not part of the ARMM and residents there did not participate in the elections. End Note.)

Complaints of Cheating

[5](#). (C) Even before results the are officially announced, some candidates are crying foul. Ibrahim "Toto" Paglas, who is distantly trailing Ampatuan in the early unofficial tallies, complained of "having been cheated" in an August 10 press interview. He averred that he had received reports of local officials campaigning for candidates on election day near precincts and of ballots filled out in advance. An assistant to Paglas, Edgar Bullecer, contacted poloff on

August 10 and expressed "frustration with the process" and deep concern about reports of fraud. Bullecar said Paglas had not decided whether to file a protest over the election. Supporters of another gubernatorial candidate, Mahid Mutilan, claimed that their candidate was cheated, specifically in Maguindinao Province (the bailiwick of Ampatuan). House Deputy Speaker Abdulgani "Gerry" Salapuddin, who withdrew from the governor's race after Lakas endorsed Ampatuan (ref e), attended an August 10 rally in Basilan, calling on COMELEC to declare the ARMM elections "a failure." Salapuddin told the crowd, "What happened was selection, not election."

Concerns about Irregularities

16. (C) International observers also have concerns about the elections. Beverly Hagerdon Thakur (Amcit -- please protect), an expert with the International Foundation on Election Systems (IFES), was generally critical of the polls' credibility. (Note: IFES, an international NGO, has been operating in the Philippines on a two-year USAID grant focused on assisting electoral reforms. End Note.) In an August 11 conversation with poloff, she characterized the election as "not clean" and alleged that at least some of the alleged fraud may have been well-orchestrated. According to Hagerdon, a key civil society group that IFES works with, the Citizens Coalition for ARMM elections (CCAE), has yet to put out a statement on the credibility of the August 8 polls. CCAE members indicated that they were worried that if they said anything negative about COMELEC they would lose their accreditation in future elections. The Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting (PPCRV), the COMELEC-accredited civil society poll-watching arm, has similarly been quiet on the subject of the fairness and credibility of the elections.

17. (C) Mission observers reported that, although incidents of possible cheating at the polls may have been isolated, a chaotic atmosphere at ballot counting centers created ample opportunities for non-transparent tallying or possible vote padding. Mission personnel witnessed several potentially suspicious actions, such as unauthorized people at the counting stations, abandoned ballot boxes, insufficient numbers of poll watchers at the counting centers, and tally sheets apparently filled out in advance of counting (see refs b and c). Observers from the embassies of Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom reported similar problems at a post-election wrap-up meeting on August 10, though they agreed that it would be difficult to try to infer an overall picture of the elections from the small number of sites observers visited. Nonetheless, despite allegations of fraud and irregularities, interlocutors generally believe that the election this year was an improvement over those in the past. Contacts noted in particular the relatively peaceful nature of the voting and counting and expressed hope that this would be the trend in the future.

Comment

18. (C) If Ampatuan indeed wins, it will not be a surprise. His family is well-known and he had the backing of Lakas, which was taken by many as an implicit endorsement by Malacanang (the President, in fact, remained publicly neutral). Unfortunately, despite GRP promises to keep them clean, the elections already have a taint on them. As noted, Mission observers and those from other countries witnessed localized instances of irregularities and there were other apparent anomalies. Amid the general chaos of Philippine elections, it is difficult to assess whether the alleged fraud was large-scale and actually had an impact on the results, however. It is, for example, difficult to envisage any candidate overcoming Ampatuan's natural advantages in the gubernatorial race. The GRP will no doubt try to muddle through, though the ARMM elections -- like the May 2004 national elections -- underscore the point that COMELEC is badly in need of additional reform.

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